

McMurtry (L.S.)

MEMOIR

OF

JOHN D. JACKSON, M. D.

BY

L. S. McMURTRY, M. D.,

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By L. S. McMURTRY, M. D.

This accomplished physician and admirable man, so widely known and highly appreciated by the medical profession of America, merits more than a passing notice of his high attainments and noble character in the medical literature of the day.

There has always been much diversity of opinion as to the essence of true greatness, but there are certain elements of character and qualities of mind which furnish indisputable claims to distinction. The recognition of the high professional and literary attainments which the subject of this memoir has received from the medical profession of the country, and the estimation in which his ability and noble character were held by all who knew him, will place his claims to this high position beyond dispute, and obtain for him a permanent position in the galaxy of worthy names which will adorn the medical biography of the present century.

While beginning the narrative of this brief but brilliant and useful career, we are aware that it may be urged that Dr. Jackson added no great discovery to the results of original investigation by which our science has been enriched; but, as has been remarked by one of the great leaders of our profession in this country, originality is many-sided, and may exhibit itself in a great variety of ways. Originality is as truly exhibited by the physician in the application of principles to practice, in the confirmation of theories advanced, and in the presentation and illustration in another light

of facts previously made known, as by the historian in the interpretation and appreciation of events already recorded.

The subject of these remarks afforded an example of the medical scholar and practitioner such as is rarely seen in combination, and the incidents of his life offer a valuable lesson to the younger members of the profession which he honored by his devoted labors. His brilliant career, so soon closed, demonstrates what can be accomplished by an active, brilliant, vigorous intellect, and a heart filled with noble impulses, together with untiring diligence and determined effort, all devoted to a noble work, even when removed from the influence of those surroundings which inspire the best efforts of medical men.

John Davies Jackson was born in Danville, Kentucky, on December 12th, 1834, and died at that place on December 8th, 1875, not completing the forty-first year of his life. He was the eldest child of John and Margaret Jackson, both natives of Kentucky. His father, two brothers and three sisters, are living at the present time, but his mother died in his early youth. He grew up in the place of his nativity, which was also the scene of his labors during his professional life.

He received his education at Centre College, Danville, Ky., from which institution he received the degree of A. B. in 1854. Although the assertion that the child is father to the man can not be applied generally, there can be no question but that in many instances the tastes and inclinations of the boy foreshadow the life and character of the man. It was to a great extent illustrated in this case; Dr. Jackson was by nature a student. The quick perception, close application, attentive observation and thorough investigation, with wonderfully retentive memory, which characterized his professional career, was manifested to a marked degree in acquiring the classical education which was to be the foundation of his future activity and usefulness.

He once remarked to the writer that had he consulted his tastes alone, he would have devoted himself to the art of painting. Indeed his talent in this direction was quite marked, and during his entire life he evinced high appreciation of artistic skill, and could readily detect the master hand in painting, statuary and engraving. However, he happily determined to devote himself to the study of medicine, and very soon after his graduation at Centre College

he entered the office of his uncle, Dr. Thos. W. Jackson, of Danville, as a pupil. He was an exceedingly modest and unassuming young man, and devoted himself with assiduity to his studies. He went into society but very seldom, and unless thrown in his company frequently, very few could know of the distinguished traits of his mind and character as manifested at that time.

In the fall of 1854 he matriculated in the medical department of the University of Louisville, which was the leading medical school of the West and South. The names of Gross, Flint, Palmer, Miller, Rogers, Yandell and Smith graced the faculty roll of this institution at that time. After spending the interval in laborious study in the office of his uncle, he attended a course at the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1857. *Vis Conservatrix et Medicatrix Nature* was the subject selected for his thesis, which was written in pleasing style, and gave evidence of good command of language and careful observation. The literary merits of this essay were highly creditable.

By his training in college and his early acquired studious habits, he had learned how to study. The value of the power indicated by this expression is known to all teachers and students of medicine. At the very beginning he acquired an intense fondness for his professional studies, and this, with his quick perception, indefatigable industry, and retentive memory, enabled him to enter upon the practice of medicine familiar with the principles which were to guide his action, and well informed as to the state of medical and surgical science at that day.

Immediately upon graduating he returned to his native place and opened an office. He entered upon his professional career with a distinct plan, high purposes and unlimited ambition. From the outset to the close of practical life he despised the artful and obsequious methods too often resorted to, even at the present day, for obtaining employment. An essay written by him some years later shows that the facilities for observing "the Black Arts in Medicine" were by no means wanting. He has often remarked to the writer that he determined to deserve success, and never to seek it in a manner unbecoming the dignity and honor of his profession.

Even in his native city the circle of his acquaintance was quite limited. With studious habits, modest demeanor, and retiring dis-

position, he was slow to extend his acquaintance beyond that acquired in youth, and his social visits were very few indeed. He was eminently an independent man, and at this time, as during his entire life, would in no manner compromise himself. He so constantly kept in view his determination to avoid courting popular favor as a means of securing business, that his bearing was frequently misinterpreted as haughty and distant. Practice came very slowly, but the time was by no means lost. Just so soon as his ability was discovered his services were sought. Being always at his post in his office, the accidents and emergencies requiring immediate attention, in the absence of other physicians, furnished opportunities to demonstrate his superior skill. The probationary years, so often spent by young physicians in bewailing their misfortunes, were utilized by labor, which had much to do with his success in after years. With astonishing energy and unflagging perseverance he pursued his studies, devoting himself to his text books and the few periodicals which he then received. He steadily worked his way into practice, doing everything with care and attention, and when the great civil war broke out, he had established a good practice which was rapidly increasing.

Dr. Jackson never took an active part in politics, seldom talked upon such subjects, and would not engage in political controversies, yet he was a man of chivalric feelings and positive opinions. His opinions upon all subjects were formed deliberately after carefully surveying the ground, and when once formed they were decided. Having adopted a course, he was steadfast and unwavering, and pursued it with fidelity to the end. He determined to cast his lot with the South, and leaving home, friends, his growing practice, he entered the Confederate army as a surgeon. During the first years of his service he was with the Army of the Tennessee, and for the remainder of the time with the Army of Northern Virginia. His rank was that of a surgeon, and he was in the field, discharging active and laborious duty during the whole time, excepting a short period when in hospital from a severe illness, brought on by exposure and fatigue. He received his parole at Appomattox, when the closing scene of that long and bloody drama was enacted.

As a military surgeon he served with honor and distinction. His labors here were actuated by patriotism and a high sense of

duty. He declined an offer of high promotion, preferring to remain in the field with his command. During a great portion of the time he acted in the capacity of brigade and division surgeon, and his duties were discharged with signal energy and ability. His valuable report upon vaccination among the troops, which was published by order of the surgeon-general at Richmond and issued to the medical corps, will doubtless be remembered by many of his companions in the service. After the surrender he returned to his home at Danville in fine health but much depressed in spirits. He always recollected with pride and satisfaction his career in the Confederate Army, and the companionship of that service was ever afterward a sure passport to his confidence and good will.

The condition into which the country at large, and especially the south, was precipitated just after the war, caused him, as it did many other southerners, to think of seeking a home elsewhere. With this view, he corresponded with some of the ministers in South America. In the meantime he was urged by his old patrons and friends to resume practice, which he finally elected to do, and again opened an office in Danville.

At that time he seemed to engage in his labors with renewed energy and determination. With his characteristic industry he began to collect a library, having lost almost all his books while absent during the war. He gave himself, with undivided attention, to the study and practice of medicine, and very soon his time was fully occupied with business.

About this time he began the study of the French language, and by means of his familiarity with Latin and his studious habits, he was soon able to read and translate with ease, and by continued practice he became thoroughly acquainted with the language. Having in this way obtained the key to a rich field of literature, he utilized it to great advantage, and became acquainted with the writings of the best medical authors among the French.

His reputation as a physician of superior knowledge and judgment, and as a surgeon of skill and ability, which was so promising at the opening of the war, began now to extend with renewed rapidity. His practice became more extensive, and in difficult and urgent cases in that portion of the state his services as a consultant were sought. With these increasing demands upon his

time, he pursued his studies with unflagging interest and perseverance. An essay on trichinosis written about this time and published in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, testifies to his extensive acquaintance with the current medical literature of the day, and to his thorough investigation of complex subjects.

In order to increase his knowledge generally, and to inform himself more thoroughly in certain special departments, he went to the city of New York in the winter of 1869-'70. With his usual energy and attentive observation he followed the leading surgeons and physicians of that great city, and gave particular attention to the study of the diseases of the eye and ear. At this time he was in quite robust health, his mind was very active, and he was rapidly adding to his already good store of professional knowledge. At the same time he made numerous additions to his library, all of which were selected with appreciative taste and judgment.

In the spring he returned to his home and resumed his labors, which in a very short time became quite arduous. The demands for his services became more numerous, and with the extensive reading which he accomplished, duties in the state and county societies, of which he was an active member, and attention to his office pupils, his time was fully occupied. But, like all professional men who accomplish a great deal, he knew how to systematize the time and make use of the minutes.

The writer can testify that most of his essays and clinical reports were written in the intervals between his numerous calls and with constant interruptions. His lucid translations of a number of the valuable clinical lessons of Jaccoud were prepared under similar circumstances.

In order to perfect his professional knowledge, Dr. Jackson sailed for Europe in May, 1872. He visited England as a delegate from the American Medical Association to the British Medical Association, and attended the meeting of that body in Birmingham. He spent some time in London, visiting hospitals and other places of interest. He visited Edinburgh, Berlin, Vienna and Paris, in which latter city he spent some months in the pursuit of special studies. By means of his numerous letters of introduction, pleasing manners, superior knowledge, and gentlemanly deportment, he made the acquaintance of many of the prominent teachers and practitioners of the Old World, and by personal observation

acquainted himself with the most recent advances in medical and surgical science. He returned home late in the autumn, and at once his time was fully occupied with general practice, consultations and operations.

Very soon after his return he undertook the translation of Farabeuf's Manual on the Ligation of Arteries, which he accomplished in the most creditable manner, and soon afterward the work was issued in the best style of the Lippincotts. He next prepared a biographical sketch of Dr. Ephraim McDowell, and brought prominently before the profession the unquestionable claims of the Father of Ovariectomy. He devoted himself with energy and determination to the perpetuation of the memory of this great surgeon, and forcibly presented to the profession the claims of the originator of this grand operation for recognition and respect. Beginning in the Boyle County Medical Society, he pressed these claims on until they were brought before the National Association, and a distinct plan was there adopted for accomplishing the laudable purpose. The existence of the McDowell Memorial Fund, and the other steps being taken to honor the memory of the first ovariectomist, are almost entirely due his labors in this direction.

It was his custom during every winter to refresh his anatomical knowledge by dissections, and to practice the most important surgical operations upon the cadaver, his students participating with him in this important work. He also availed himself of every opportunity to perfect his knowledge of morbid processes by post mortem examination. In the spring of 1873, while engaged in an autopsy, he made some accidental scratches upon a finger, which affected his whole system. He suffered intensely with inflammation of the entire hand and arm, and at one time it seemed that an axillary abscess would result. He was suffering with a severe cold at the time, and was confined to his room with high fever and much pain for some days. He so far improved during the following month as to attend the meeting of the American Medical Association in St. Louis, where he contracted additional cold, which was accompanied with severe laryngitis.

He returned home and resumed his practice, although suffering with a cough and thoracic pains, with febrile exacerbations. During the summer he was compelled to discontinue his labors, and to visit the Blue Lick Springs in Kentucky, where he sought to recruit his strength by rest and relaxation from work.

In the fall he again resumed practice, but towards spring his troubles were renewed with increased gravity. The laryngitis returned in aggravated form, with copious muco-purulent expectoration, pain in the chest and febrile movement.

He attended the meeting of the American Medical Association at Detroit in June, 1874, and his alarming symptoms were so apparent as to attract the anxious attention of his friends in the Association. He was urged to give up work and to seek a restoration of health by rest and other means. He proceeded to New York from Detroit, and sought the advice of the highest authorities on diseases of the chest. By the advice obtained here he discontinued all professional labor, and spent the summer in the North, under circumstances favoring a restoration of his health. He returned home in the fall with his health somewhat improved, but with symptoms of the most alarming nature. It was evident that his lungs were seriously involved.

After some weeks at home, he went to Florida, where he spent the winter in hunting and fishing, remaining in the open air as much as possible. He was much improved in flesh and strength by his stay in Florida, and started home about the middle of April, 1875. While stopping over in Nashville for a few days, by a sudden change in the weather he took a violent cold, which was followed by congestion of the lungs. He was completely prostrated by this stroke, and was confined to his bed for a number of days with high fever and great pain. Reaching Louisville during the session of the American Medical Association in that city, he was exhausted and broken down in health.

He was confined to his room during the entire session of the Association. He was visited at his hotel by many distinguished members of the Association, and was the recipient of the most tender attentions from his numerous friends in that body. Resolutions of sympathy for his severe affliction were adopted by the Association, and every possible mark of esteem and respect shown for him. During this meeting he was elected first vice-president of the Association for the ensuing year.

On the 8th of May, attended by a medical friend, he arrived at Danville, and at once repaired to the residence of his brother. He improved somewhat during the summer months, and spent a great deal of his time in the open air, being able to ride out

in pleasant weather. His grave chest troubles continued, and he suffered a great deal with laryngitis and frequent gastrointestinal disturbance. In the fall, although quite feeble, he visited Cincinnati for a few days, and on his return a severe cold was superadded to his troubles, by which he was still further reduced in flesh and strength. During the entire time he was a great sufferer, which toward the last became intense and excruciating. He bore it all with a resignation and heroism unequalled in the observation of the writer.

During the month of November his condition was extreme, and it became evident that the end was very near at hand. He contemplated his approaching dissolution with calmness and without fear. He spoke in touching terms of the dear friends he would leave behind, of the many kindnesses he had received during his illness, and expressed regret at being unable to accomplish certain purposes of his life. He had no fears as to the future, and looking back upon a life devoted to conscientious, self-sacrificing discharge of duty, he accepted the result with resignation. He was in possession of his mental faculties to a remarkable degree up to the time of his death, and foresaw the end almost to a moment. While in a paroxysm of coughing, he died on December 8th, at 3 o'clock, P. M.

In accordance with his request, the funeral was conducted in a plain and unostentatious manner; attended by a large number of bereaved persons, and by a good portion of the medical profession of central Kentucky.

Every mark of affection and esteem which a grateful community and sympathizing profession could offer had been freely tendered during his entire illness, and the sorrow produced by his untimely death was universal and profound.

Expressions of sorrow and of respect were made by the medical organizations which he had adorned, and the medical journals, whose pages he had enriched by his scholarly contributions.

Dying at an age when his influence was most extensive and his attainments most thorough and complete, we can scarcely estimate the loss which the profession in America has sustained. One who is generally conceded to stand in the first rank of the profession has said of him: "Of noble nature morally, he had more promise of intellectual distinction than any young member of our profession with whom I have come in contact."

In summing up the character of Dr. Jackson, he must be accredited with superior talents, extensive learning and practical knowledge, towering ambition, untiring industry, a definite aim in life, undeviating fidelity to his profession, and in every respect a pure and elevated character. He was an able thinker, careful observer of men and things, a model general practitioner of medicine, and possessed a philosophic mind capable of vast and varied labor.

One distinguishing trait of his character was its fixed and well-defined outlines. When sure that he was in the right, as declared by his judgment, he was incorruptible and uncompromising. He entertained the most supreme contempt for pretense and hypocrisy, and could not endure it in his profession or outside.

As a practitioner of medicine he was courteous and kind, and he was eminently a charitable man. In the sick chamber he was tender and firm, and with great practical knowledge which seemed always at his command, superior judgment, and inspiring presence, he exerted an influence for the welfare of his patients which is rarely surpassed.

He performed many of the most important operations in surgery, and as a surgeon he was prompt, deliberate and dextrous. The confidence and admiration he elicited from those who came under his professional care were as wonderful as universal.

As a writer he was clear, concise and elegant. No one can read his essays without being struck with the extent of his information and his intimate acquaintance with the literature of medicine. He was both a rapid and retentive reader, and the facility with which he recalled what he had read was remarkable.

He was a very modest man, and at the same time possessed much spirit and courage. He was quick to resent an insult and very sensible of any intended slight.

In his relations with his fellow practitioners he was obliging, generous and ethical. So far as can be learned, unethical conduct was never imputed to him, and his high honor and integrity were admitted both by his enemies and his rivals.

It is almost impossible to estimate the value of his services to the medical profession and indirectly to the public of central Kentucky. The Boyle County (Ky.) Medical Society, one of the most efficient and useful organizations in the State, as well as the Central Kentucky Medical Association, owes its organization and pres-

ent prosperous condition for the most part to his efforts. He was also one of the most energetic and valuable members of the Kentucky State Medical Society.

He never allowed an opportunity for the dissemination of useful knowledge among his brethren around him to pass unimproved, while it was his constant effort to obtain an appreciation of the honorable nature of his calling.

Dr. Jackson was a model preceptor, and prepared his pupils to appreciate to their full extent the lectures upon entering the colleges. He elicited their profound respect and admiration, and his interest in their success was continuous. He imparted instruction to them with scrupulous care by recitations, dissections and demonstrations, and by his own exemplary and upright course taught them medical ethics.

Dr. Jackson was an unmarried man, his social visits were few, and his time was devoted almost exclusively to his profession, which he devotedly loved. His intimate personal friends outside his profession were very few, but by these he was highly appreciated. He was a man of wonderful personal magnetism, and no one capable of appreciating him could come in contact with him without being impressed with his ability. With fine conversational powers, varied and extensive information and gentlemanly deportment, he was a most agreeable companion. In his friendship he was sincere and steadfast under all circumstances.

In personal appearance he was above the medium height, very erect, and rather slender. He had fine bluish-gray eyes, a firm expression about the mouth, and a splendid forehead denotive of great intellect and superior intelligence. He was active and energetic in his manner, and neat and plain in his dress. In his habits he was as systematic as a physician in active practice can well be. Whatever he had to do he did at once without delay, and it was by his promptness that he accomplished so much. This habit was the secret of his having time to attend to the duties of medical societies, his correspondence, and other such demands upon his time.

Dr. Jackson had quite a number of compliments paid his talents by his profession. He was a corresponding member of the Gynæcological Society of Boston, an honorary member of the Louisville Obstetrical Society, and of the California State Medical

Society. On more than one occasion he was solicited to accept a chair in a medical institution, and in 1874 he was invited to deliver the address before the alumni of the University of Pennsylvania. He was an unassuming man, and was fond of his life as a practitioner in the community which he so ably served.

When we view the character which is imperfectly portrayed here in its entirety, it is then that it can be best appreciated. When we consider the circumstances under which the subject of this sketch began his professional career, the obstacles which were surmounted by his efforts, and the high position to which he attained at an early age, by merit and industry alone, we can realize that he was no ordinary man.

Dr. Jackson belonged to that class of men who build their own monuments. No marble shaft is essential to the perpetuation of his memory, which will be green while the present generation lives, and his name will be embalmed with honor in the literature of the profession to which he devoted his noble life.



